

February 10, 2014

Chair Gelser and members of the House Committee on Education,

I am testifying in support of HB 4127 because it ensures respect for the voices of educators by granting them their rightful place at the table in the OEIB. The current configuration of said Board (and all its subcommittees) has little representation from educational practitioners (who must ultimately be the delivery mechanism for every mandate that emerges from the federal, the state and the local levels.) And, believe me, it's raining mandates.

No Child Left Behind. Race to the Top. Common Core. Smarter Balance. HB 2220. SB 290 (teacher evaluations). SB 222. Dual Credit. And on it goes.

Somewhere in between juggling all the above, we teach.

And, despite the fact that some of the current members of the OEIB are superintendents or college presidents, they are not familiar with the current realities on the ground for K-12 teachers.

I have attended 4 OEIB meetings. Few members of the Board even showed up for the first two meetings. I attended one meeting at Marshall High School in SE Portland in 2012 (a meeting called by the OEIB for the express purpose of receiving public testimony). Hanna Vaandering, the sole K-12 teacher on the OEIB, was the only Board member in attendance to face a roomful of passionate educators, parents and students who were hungry to weigh in on the issues. The two I have recently attended (since Nancy Golden's tenure) have been subcommittees dealing with very specific aspects of OEIB work. Hanna Vaandering sat on one of them, but there was not a current K-12 teacher on the Accelerated Learning committee whose job it was to consider Dual Credit.

As a teacher, I find this baffling. Since I have taught Dual Credit courses, I am a resource. I have the direct experience to explain how that idea works (or doesn't) on the ground. None of the legislators, principals, community college presidents, ODE staff and others on the committee had any direct experience with that process. So, when that committee proposes investments and mandates, for the most part, it will fall on a teacher's back to make that happen.

Every mandate has meant an incursion into the time I have to prepare for students.

I am a high school social studies teacher in a District that has made it a priority to keep class sizes fairly low. Even so, my full-time (6 periods) student load is always around 180. Interestingly, a high school principal (on the Accelerated Learning committee) told me that German teachers visiting her school commented on the large student loads shouldered by U.S. teachers and shared that their load is capped at 110 students.

When I attended the Outcomes and Investments subcommittee this past January, I heard some very interesting ideas being bandied about – once again by those who don't really understand teaching. One member discussed incentivizing goals (I don't know whether that was to be for whole Districts or individual teachers) – but, either way, it reveals a misunderstanding of the education process and a rather too fond belief in the power of using test scores (as either carrots or sticks.) Thankfully, a member of the committee did remark that children “aren't widgets.”

I have long been concerned about the OEIB.

My concerns include the following:

1. It appears to be another unelected bureaucratic overlay (like the ODE) that will create new mandates for teachers and simultaneously suck needed monies from the classroom (pamphlets must be produced and bureaucrats need to be paid).

2. The discussions of the use of student data (test scores) is reductionist and fails to consider the whole human being or the amazing student growth this is observable by a classroom teacher, but not measurable by any test.
3. The lack of educator input. I applaud and support HB 4127, yet I worry it may be too late. So many gears have already been set in motion; I have concerns about our ability to redirect. Institutional momentum (like a glacier) is a force unto itself and hard to stop.

Despite my misgivings, I am here to urge this committee to give educators their rightful place at the table. Restore this social studies teacher's faith in the belief that it is still meaningful to teach high school students about the importance of civic engagement because government must be responsive to the People. HB 4127 is a step in the right direction.

I had intended to testify in person, but the changed date made that impossible.

Sincerely,

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